

Remarks by Lt. Governor Becky Skillman
to the Indiana Women's Veterans Conference
April 14, 2007

Good afternoon. It's a great honor to be with you today. Being with veterans or those in uniform is always a pleasure, but it is especially good to be with a group of women veterans today.

You have an inspiring legacy, and I want to thank you for the unique sacrifices you have made to serve our country. There are sacrifices common to everyone who serves in the armed forces. But I know as women, you have had another set of challenges in your service so thank you for your sacrifice in serving as women.

SUCCESSFUL WOMEN

When I talk to women who have been successful in their careers, I hear a common refrain. They think they have to be *overqualified* in order to succeed. When I talk to men who are in similar positions, to their credit, they think they were *born* qualified.

Certainly, in the military, those perceptions are just as real as they are in business or government. It's very interesting to hear the two sexes describe their own competence to lead and succeed. I can certainly relate to the sense of being the underdog and needing to prove myself.

I am, from time to time, the only skirt in a room full of suits, and I know the challenges women face in responding to the call to leadership and service. Thankfully though, we live in a country and a culture that appreciates the contributions of women.

We appreciate the contributions of women like Colonel Marge Courtney, a National Guard Garrison Commander at Camp Victory in Baghdad. She is there right now, in the midst of the battle, fully in command and control.

I was recently with General Martin Umbarger of the Indiana National Guard on a trip to the Mexican border, visiting our deployed Guard members. He praised Colonel Courtney and many others like her. I was pleased to learn that 18 percent of Indiana's National Guard is female. General Umbarger was clearly proud of the women under his command. He has every reason to be. They are some of Indiana's best.

It's no easy thing to serve in any branch of the armed forces. Our men and women in uniform are our most precious resources.

Indiana is, indeed, part of a nation at war. Our efforts to destroy terrorism require the support and participation of every last citizen, whether those citizens wear uniforms or plain clothes. We have a real enemy, but the good news is we have real heroes as well.

In Indiana, our citizen soldiers and airmen and women of the National Guard have been deployed in record numbers since 9/11. That has placed an unexpected burden on guard members, families and employers—all in different ways.

We are humbled by and grateful for the service of the troops from all branches of the armed services, and the sacrifice of their families.

VETERANS BILL

Governor Daniels and I want to make our gratitude felt as much as possible. We are working to secure important benefits for Hoosier Veterans during this year's legislative session. So far, our bill has won great support from the Senate and House and I expect the Governor will sign it into law soon.

We plan to do the right thing for our veterans by:

- Exempting all military pay earned while serving in combat from Indiana state income tax.
- Increasing state income tax deductions on military pay from \$2,000 to \$5,000 per year.
- Extending the delayed high school diploma program to veterans of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts who left high school before graduation to serve.
- Allowing in-state tuition rates at universities for out-of-state soldiers assigned to Indiana.
- \$350,000 in matching funds for Military Family Relief Fund.

Those are just a few of the benefits in the package.

Our state Housing and Community Development Authority has also been hard at work to show Hoosier veterans our support. The program called "First Home" has helped many Hoosiers buy their very first home, including many veterans and their families.

I am pleased to announce that IHCD is waiving the first-time homebuyer requirement just for veterans. This will allow them to secure a fixed rate mortgage that is BELOW the market interest rate on ANY home they purchase, not only their first home.

Our support for Hoosier veterans is at the top of our priority list. We are working diligently for you because Indiana owes you a tremendous debt of gratitude for your leadership, your sacrifice, and your example.

BEING IN THE MINORITY

Our veterans embody so many of the qualities we value as Hoosiers—honor, trust, diligence and leadership. Those qualities are not necessarily unique to any one group of people, any one gender, or any one age group—but our military attracts the strong and the brave from them all. The challenge of boot camp and active duty strike fear in the faint of heart, but excite the leaders in our midst.

The extra challenges you have faced as women have made you work harder and learn more. They have developed your character. I know my own experience has taught me that, though on a much smaller scale than your service.

As I said, I'm used to being in the minority—so to speak—but that has never held me back. If anything, the challenge of proving myself has made me a better leader, a better public servant, and a better woman. It can make every woman better.

Last fall, I traveled to Taiwan and Vietnam, leading a trade delegation. It was a great trip, and I came home very aware of the differences between our cultures. I walked into a meeting with some of their leaders one day and saw that my name plate read “Mr. Becky Skillman.” They certainly weren’t expecting ME. It was one of my favorite moments of the trip. But it drove home the point that not everyone expects a woman to be in a leadership position.

In Indiana, we have a responsibility to ourselves and to our daughters, our nieces, and all the young women of the next generation—to step up and do what President Kennedy called us to do years ago. He said, “It is time for a new generation of leadership, to cope with new problems and new opportunities. For there is a new world to be won.”

A rejuvenated Indiana is our new world. And here in this room, we have people who are more than capable of creating a bright new future for all Hoosiers. I would venture to say that some of the more “mature” audience members played a big part in creating the good things we enjoy today.

HARDWORKING ROLE MODELS

Through your service in the armed forces, you have become role models for the next generation. You have led by example for the good of our state and our nation—not for your own glory.

It is often a thankless job to do what has to be done. I only have to remind you of everything you have done for your children, everything your mother or grandmother have done for you. Think of the countless hours they invested you—teaching you, providing for you, helping you grow. But it’s not likely that anyone put them on a pedestal for it. They simply chose to do the work that needed to be done.

There’s humility inherent in that kind of service.

I don’t think it’s any accident that there are similarities between a good mother and a sergeant major. Both achieve the rank and the respect through years of service, often enlisting at a young age and putting in many years of hard work. Of course, the comparison breaks down quickly. My mother never looked at my cuts and scrapes and told me to rub some dirt on it and keep running!

But you understand my point. It takes some grit and courage to be in the military. It takes the same stuff to be a woman. Put those two together, and you’ve got the extraordinary people sitting in this room. A strong, resilient and proud group of Hoosiers!

Women veterans like you, who have done your duty over the years—whether or not anyone is watching—have taught us what duty and honor really mean.

LIFE LESSONS

There was a minister who used to end every sermon with what he called “shoe leather points.” They were the practical things he wanted people to take away from his message and use throughout the week. I’d like to end my time here with some of my own shoe leather points; some practical lessons I have learned over the years.

The first is to aim high and maximize your potential. Governor Daniels and I have pledged to do all that we can to develop the great potential we all know exists in Indiana. We pledge to work each and every day to create new jobs, new opportunities, and a new climate of prosperity for each of you in this room to embrace. You do your part to be prepared; we'll do our part to build the opportunity.

The second lesson I have learned is to give back to others. We are obligated to live our lives in a way that benefits more than ourselves. Each of you understands what that means. Many people believe that what makes them happy is having someone else do something for them, but in reality, the opposite is true. When we serve our family, our community and our country, we always get back more than we give. Servant leadership is, perhaps, leadership in its truest form.

The third lesson is to lead by inspiration. One of my favorite quotes comes from John Quincy Adams. He wrote, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, and become more, you are a leader." His lesson to all of us is that leadership can come from anywhere. We can be all be leaders by supporting those around us and enabling them to dream more, learn more, and become more.

This last bit of advice may run contrary to what you have come to believe in your life journey so far. But one of the biggest secrets to true success is to give yourself a reserve of time and energy. That is probably just the opposite of what you would expect to hear, and it is advice that I need to follow, as well.

You should work hard and give of yourself, but you also have to take care of yourself. If you schedule every minute of your time and use every ounce of energy, when something out of the ordinary happens—and it always does—where will you find the strength to deal with it? Say no when you need to, so that when you say yes, your heart will be in it.

CONCLUSION

I am certainly glad I said "yes" to this group. You have a lot of spirit, and that's inspiring to me.

The Governor and I have been in office a little over two years now. I have had the pleasure of satisfying work—to roll up my sleeves and simply do what has to be done to move Indiana forward.

There are 6.2 million Hoosiers, and it's my job, the Governor's job, our administration's job to serve all of those people. Everything we do—every policy, every attempt to be more efficient—it's all because Hoosiers are gaining something from it. Better jobs, better schools, better futures.

Indiana can be a place of prosperity for all Hoosiers. Governor Daniels and I know that government doesn't create wealth, but good government can certainly create the conditions where wealth can grow. That's what we are striving for. Hopefully, our plans for veterans' benefits, among other things, will make your lives a little easier.

Thank you for having me here today. And thank you for your service.